

To Absolutely Drive You Wild by LaurytheLatrator

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Summary:

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To Absolutely Drive You Wild

Jonathan lied.

I didn't get you anything, I feel bad.

Well, sort of lied.

There's a mixtape with Nancy's name scrawled on it hidden in a shoebox where he keeps the rest of his cassettes. There's no easy way to tell her, *Hey, you've been on my mind since the demogorgon thing, and every time I hear a song that makes me think of you, I put it on here, so there you go, have my deepest most personal thoughts and feelings about you, Nancy, and tell Steve I say hey.*

So it lives in the shoebox in his closet.

"Hey," Nancy says, startling him even though her voice is soft. He's right to be startled; he's spent most of his lunches hiding from the student body. She had to be hunting for him. She spies the baby carrots he's munching on, the ones he brought from home, and snags one. The weirdness just gets weirder when she asks, nonchalantly, "Your birthday's coming up, isn't it?"

No one at school has ever known about his birthday. If he could, he'd erase it from the records.

A safer question than *Why do you care?* is *How did you know?* and that's what Jonathan ends up asking after several seconds of gaping silence.

"I asked Mike to ask Will," She answers with a shrug, pinging flashing neon lights around the unasked question in his mind. "Winter, huh? Mike and I are both Spring, about a week apart, and our parents' anniversary is in late Summer. Makes you think."

“January 22th,” Jonathan says, instead of replying to whatever that was. “That’s my birthday.”

“Good,” She says, taking another carrot, “You’re picking me up at 6, when you drop Will off for their sleepover. Don’t argue,” Nancy glares when he opens his mouth, out of shock than any protest, “I’ve taken care of everything.” She stands and sashays away, in perfect command of her surroundings. Jonathan finishes the rest of his lunch without tasting any of it, and wonders the whole rest of the way to class, *what the hell is his life?*

Whatever he’d expected to happen after getting Will back, this wasn’t it.

First of all, Will had his highs and lows, periods where he was so tired he could barely move and shook like a drowned rat. Hopper, after witnessing one, grimly repeated the scientists’ warnings that the atmosphere was toxic. He was getting better, the lows coming more infrequently, but it was a long road to recovery.

Secondly, the Byers were minor celebrities, no longer infamous by virtue of being white trash. Their boy had been miraculously found after being presumed dead. While Hopper organized repairs to their house, strangers joined him in stripping the wallpaper, patching the walls, and replacing the floors. Seeing Steve Harrington with a hammer and nails in his living room had been... well, he couldn’t truthfully say surreal, but definitely unexpected.

Thirdly, Nancy was everywhere. Hawkins was a small town, and it’s not like she’d avoided him before, so he was used to seeing her, but that was nothing to the way she gave him her full attention, glowing and real. She’s hanging in the basement with Mike and his friends when Jonathan comes for Will. She’s eating lunch with him in empty stairwells. She’s asking him for rides home, since Barb used to do the honors.

That's the only conclusion he can come to. She lost her best friend, and at the same time got to know him, so she's lonely and looking to... 'replace' is too unkind. There's a void in her life and Nancy's chosen him to fill it. He can't argue with that, doesn't want to really. Jonathan's never had a best friend before.

The morning of his birthday, his mom treats him to breakfast, french toast, and exclaims how excited she is for him to be going out with Nancy. No matter how much she insists she understands they're just friends, Joyce has a gleam in her eye that Jonathan knows all too well.

It's a Friday, and school is surprisingly bearable. Nicole even smiled at him, sheepishly, furtively. He remembers when they used to get along, being two of the few students who regularly developed film. She traded friendly smiles with him in for popularity with Tommy and Carol. No, he thinks after she's rushed away, that's unfair. If he'd seen someone with creepy photos of other students... he should be grateful she didn't call the police.

After school he plays some Atari with Will, after making sure his brother did some obligatory homework. All evening his leg is bouncing, going over and over, wondering what Nancy has in store.

Finally 5:45 rolls around, and Will's babbling about the sleepover, and Jonathan bundles him into the car and takes off.

The Wheeler's front door opens and Nancy is standing there, wearing a black Blondie t-shirt tucked into a plaid skirt, over black leggings and under a parka because it's January in Indiana, but his brain still short circuits.

"Hey, Will," Nancy greets his brother warmly, "Mike's downstairs, he's really excited to show you his new VHS tape." Will needs no further prompting, rushing past her to stomp down the stairs. Jonathan sticks his fists in his pockets. The cold's as good an excuse

as any.

He just has to know, so he croaks out, “What are you wearing?”

Nancy presses a hand fondly over Debbie Harry’s face. “It was Barb’s, she loved girl rock.” There’s only a beat of silence, before Nancy bounces back. “Besides, I need to fit in where we’re going, and this is the best I could do.”

“Where...?”

“Haven’t you ever heard of a surprise?” She strides past him, zipping her parka, making for his car. “I’ll give you the directions, you just drive! Come on, birthday boy!”

They’re just leaving Hawkins when Nancy finds a cassette in the glovebox. Glancing at it briefly, his gaze is arrested by the faded *Nancy* on the back. Shit. How the fuck...? One of the early versions he’d burned, it has to be...

She puts it in, B-side up, and Jonathan thinks he might die when Queen comes on.

“Oh I love this song!” Nancy exclaims, chiming in with Freddie Mercury right as he sings, “ *Just like Marie Antoinette!* ”

She looks so good singing, he isn’t sure why he says, “You know what people say about him?” Nancy meets his eyes, and he shrinks back, watching the road. He remembers the cashier’s face when he bought Queen’s vinyl. He’d half expected to be jumped walking to his car.

When Nancy speaks, it’s soft and a little shy. “Barb didn’t like boys. She knew that I did, and she helped me, supported me. But I knew she ...” It must be hard, to spill a dead girl’s secret. To live knowing you were the only one who carried it anymore. This was a part of Barb that only she knew.

Jonathan shifted his grip on the wheel. "Folks used to call me fag because I like Bowie and I never had a girlfriend." The rumors changed after Will disappeared. Pervert was the one spray-painted on walls and lockers. But there was also the opinion that Jonathan couldn't be gay, he'd managed to lure good girl Nancy Wheeler into pity fucking him. He isn't going to mention that; what cleared his reputation gave her a terrible one, one that she hadn't yet managed to shake.

He wonders if he has to say, *I do like girls* , but that leads uncomfortably to, *I like a girl* , which goes directly to, *You, Nancy, I like you* . So Jonathan does what he does best and keeps his mouth shut.

"I guess it's different for boys than girls," Nancy says, still bouncing her head along to Queen. "You know I never knew Mike was being bullied until a couple weeks ago?" That doesn't surprise him. He knew Will was getting bullied, the same sort of insults Jonathan had received, but almost bizarre when aimed at a 12 year old who was barely old enough to be interested in anyone. But the Wheelers weren't as close as the Byers, didn't have to be, hadn't been forged in fire before the Upside Down.

"Turn right, up here," Nancy directs, and he takes the exit towards a slightly larger town than Hawkins.

"You're really not gonna give me a clue?" Jonathan asks, smiling at her. Joan Jett comes on next, and Nancy looks electric.

"How do you have such good taste in music?" She says instead, leaning forward and dancing in her seat. It's distracting and perfect, and Jonathan just focuses on getting them to this mystery location in one piece.

"A concert?" Jonathan repeats, staring at the marquee. "You brought me two towns over for a concert?"

“Okay, so,” Nancy begins breathlessly, “You’re really hard to shop for. You already had the new camera, so that was photography out. The only other things I know about you are your taste in music and how you fight an extra-dimensional monster. It was either this or buying you more bear traps, okay?”

Jonathan keeps staring at the marquee. It’s a rock band, he knows that much, but he hasn’t actually heard their music. The venue is small, like the Hawkin’s main street movie theater. And Nancy Wheeler, good girl, badass, perfect Nancy Wheeler, is holding two tickets and wearing the most insecure and contrite expression he’s ever seen.

“Why—I mean—do you even like rock?”

She squares her shoulders and looks at him with something akin to a glare. “Just because I haven’t experienced it before doesn’t mean I won’t like it, Jonathan Byers.”

“I...” There isn’t much to say to that. “If you’re sure...?”

“For Christ’s sake,” She swears, grabbing his arm, “It’s your birthday, try having fun!”

And he does. Boy, does he.

“Can you believe it?” Nancy raves as they flow with the others out of the theater. “I mean, can you really believe!?”

“Yeah, Nance,” Jonathan answers, the nickname coming out easily on a laugh, “I liked it too.”

“That was so cool!” Her enthusiasm is a nice contrast to the ennui and apathy of the other concert goers. It makes him value her that much more. “I loved the covers, you know? Like, it’s so much better when you know the words.” Yeah, he could see that. Mostly he couldn’t unsee Nancy jumping and screaming lyrics at the top of her

lungs, in the crowded throng of people, sweat flying off of her, beautiful because she didn't care what she looked like. She's got echoes of it now in the way her hair is plastered to her forehead and neck, splotches of red high on her cheeks, fanning the parka open so the low temperatures will get in.

"I liked their sound, for sure," Jonathan agrees, even if she is the highlight of the night.

"Guns and Roses," She says, pointing at the marquee they're leaving behind, "Remember them okay? I'm gonna get their album."

When they're entering Hawkins, Nancy says, "Let's go to your place. My parents aren't expecting me, they know I'm with you." That amount of trust is staggering, but Jonathan obeys without mentioning it.

When they pull up to a lit house, and things make a bit more sense, Jonathan has to pause and shoot her a look. "Mom said she wouldn't be home," He says like an accusation.

Nancy grins, fiddling with the sleeves of his sweatshirt. He'd given it to her as they left, the parka too hot and her t-shirt too cold. "I was phase one, this is phase two."

"But I like phase one," Jonathan says without thinking. He blushes perfectly in time with the way her smile fades. "Sorry, I—"

"Jonathan," Nancy speaks over him, "You're my best friend." He drums a beat on the wheel, anxious, until she covers his fingers with her own. "And not just because—I mean—Like Barb, only—Fuck—I'm so bad at this." Jonathan chances looking at her face. She hasn't seemed this anxious since she talked about creatures without faces.

"Nancy, you know you're important to me," Jonathan hears coming out of his mouth. He shakes his head quickly before she can respond. "Thanks, for tonight, I really had fun."

“Me too.” They share a look, both sort of smiling, but shy. Fuck, Jonathan hadn’t thought Nancy could be shy, now he doesn’t know what to do with her. “There’s so many people who care about you,” Nancy tells him, grit and determination in her glossy eyes that shine too bright in his car. “It’s selfish to make them wait, but...” She leans across the dash of his 1971 Ford Galaxie and plants her hands on his acne covered cheeks and draws him in for the first kiss of his adult life. Jonathan leans into her, probably too much, probably he’s sloppy and uncoordinated and the absolute *worst* , but when Nancy pulls back she’s smiling, and Jonathan can’t think except of how to make her look that happy.

“I have a mixtape for you,” He blurts out in the silence. “If you like Queen and Joan Jett and Guns and Roses I think you’ll like it.”

“I’ll love it,” Nancy promises, and he kisses her again before she can say something stupid like, *Let’s go inside* , because there’s nowhere he’d rather be.

Author's Note:

I definitely fell in love with Stranger Things hard and fast. I'm in the middle of writing a more angsty Jonathan-centric piece, but I had to bang out this fluff and share it with the world. Please check out my other stories, I'm sure I'll be posting more soon.

Upped the rating for language, totally forgot how much I use fuck.